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SUBJECT: VIOLENCE AT GHANA'S KRISAN REFUGEE CAMP

1. (SBU) Summary: On November 8, refugees at Krisan camp in the Western Region of Ghana torched houses, and destroyed offices and vehicles, including from UNHCR. UNHCR's Senior Protection Officer in Ghana told PolChief and visiting RefCoord from Abidjan on November 10 that the violence was sparked by a few individuals who spread false rumors about resettlement and fed on resentment toward recently arrived Sudanese refugees. The extent of the damage is unclear. This incident has the potential to sour the climate towards refugees in Ghana. End summary.

How It All Started

2. (U) Krisan refugee camp in Western Region has almost 2,000 refugees of many nationalities, including 577 Togolese who have been in the camp for a number of years, and 580 Sudanese, who were recently moved to Krisan from Accra. According to UNHCR Ghana's Senior Protection Officer Jane Muigai, Ghanaian Minister of Interior Papa Owusu-Ankomah recently told the media that UNHCR promised to resettle the Sudanese refugees, causing resentment among the longtime Togolese refugees at Krisan. UNHCR's Acting Rep was in the area on November 1 doing contingency planning for a possible Cote d'Ivoire refugee influx, when he decided to stop by Krisan. Some fifty Togolese refugees in Krisan got advance word of his visit and packed their luggage in the mistaken belief that they would be resettled. Fearing he would be accosted by angry Togolese refugees, the UNHCR rep deferred his visit. Several trouble makers (the leaders were reportedly Liberian and Ghanaian) then spread rumors that the Togolese would be resettled if they went to Cote d'Ivoire. They also alleged that vocational training options would diminish the resettlement options for Togolese. They led a group of Togolese to the Cote d'Ivoire border but were prevented from entering. They camped out at the border and intimidated other Togolese refugees in Krisan to join them.

Outbreak of Violence

3. (U) The Ghana police dispatched 200 police to the border and, on November 8, forcibly bused some of the refugees back to Krisan. When they arrived at the camp, police were pelted with stones, responding with shots fired in the air and tear gas. The returned refugees subsequently attacked those Togolese refugees who had not joined them in the trip to the border, burning their houses. They torched a police station, the UNHCR office and other buildings, as well as a UNHCR and other vehicles. According to Muigai, the Sudanese refugees sought refuge in a mosque and did not participate in the violence. The extent of the damage is unclear at this time.

4. (U) According to Muigai, the camp remains tense, although there is little information about the current situation. According to UNHCR, the police have rounded up six suspected Togolese rioters, but not all the ring leaders. There is a significant police presence in the camp and many refugees have fled into neighboring villages and along the border for safety. The perpetrators have also fled to hide from police.

Comment

5. (SBU) Ghana has a good record of hosting refugees. However, some in the GOG and in the general public are increasingly frustrated with the refugee presence here. The Minister of Interior would like to see the Sudanese leave Ghana. Muigai noted that there had been a near riot in Budumburam camp (near Accra) in April and the GOG seems more frustrated with the presence of Togolese refugees. She has detected a growing antagonism toward refugees among Western Regional authorities. The Krisan incident, which made front page headlines in the media this week, has the potential to further sour the climate in Ghana for refugees.

BRIDGEWATER